WHAT IS CLAIMED:

1. An expression plasmid comprising an RNA polymerase I (pol I) promoter and pol I terminator sequences, which are inserted between an RNA polymerase II (pol II) promoter and a polyadenylation signal.

2. The expression plasmid of claim 1 wherein the pol I promoter is proximal to the polyadenylation signal and the pol I terminator sequence is proximal to the pol II promoter.

3. The expression plasmid of claim 1 wherein the pol I promoter is proximal to the pol II promoter and the pol I terminator sequence is proximal to the polyadenylation signal.

4. The expression plasmid of claim 1 wherein the plasmid corresponds to a plasmid having a map selected from the group consisting of pHW2000, pHW11 and pHW12.

5. The expression plasmid of claim 1, further comprising a negative strand RNA virus viral gene segment inserted between the pol I promoter and the termination signal.

6. The expression plasmid of claim 5, wherein the negative strand RNA virus is a member of the *Orthomyxoviridae* virus family.

7. The expression plasmid of claim 6, wherein the virus is an influenza A virus.

8. The expression plasmid of claim 7, wherein the viral gene segment encodes a gene selected from the group consisting of a viral polymerase complex protein, M protein, and NS protein; wherein the genes are derived from a strain well adapted to grow in cell culture or from an attenuated strain, or both.

9. The expression plasmid of claim 6, wherein the virus is an influenza B virus.

10. The expression plasmid of claim 8 wherein the plasmid has a map selected from the group consisting of pHW241-PB2, pHW242-PB1, pHW243-PA, pHW245-NP, pHW247-M, and pHW248-NS.

11. The expression plasmid of claim 8 wherein the plasmid has a map selected from the group consisting of pHW181-PB2, pHW182-PB1, pHW183-PA, pHW185-NP, pHW187-M, and pHW188-NS.

12. The expression plasmid of claim 7, wherein the viral gene segment encodes a gene selected from the group consisting of an influenza hemagglutinin (HA) gene and a neuraminidase (NA) gene.

13. The expression plasmid of claim 12, wherein the influenza gene is from a pathogenic influenza virus strain.

14. The expression plasmid of claim 12, wherein the plasmid has a map selected from the group consisting of pHW244-HA, pHW246-NA, pHW184-HA, and pHW186-NA.

15. A minimum plasmid-based system for the generation of infectious negative strand RNA viruses from cloned viral cDNA comprising a set of plasmids wherein each plasmid comprises one autonomous viral genomic segment, and wherein the viral cDNA corresponding to the autonomous viral genomic segment is inserted between an RNA polymerase I (pol I) promoter and terminator sequences, thereby resulting in expression of vRNA, which are in turn inserted between a RNA polymerase II (pol II) promoter and a polyadenylation signal, thereby resulting in expression of viral mRNA.

16. The minimum plasmid-based system of claim 15 wherein the pol I promoter is proximal to the polyadenylation signal and the pol I terminator sequence is proximal to the pol II promoter.

17. The minimum plasmid-based system of claim 15 wherein the pol I promoter is proximal to the pol II promoter and the pol I terminator sequence is proximal to the polyadenylation signal.

18. The plasmid-based system of claim 15, wherein the negative strand RNA virus is a member of the *Orthomyxoviridae* virus family.

19. The plasmid-based system of claim 18, wherein the virus is an influenza A virus.

20. The plasmid-based system of claim 18, wherein the virus is an influenza B virus.

21. The plasmid-based system of claim 19, wherein the viral gene segment encodes a protein selected from the group consisting of a viral polymerase complex protein, an M protein and an NS protein; wherein said genes are from a strain well adapted to grow in cell culture or from an attenuated strain, or both.

22. The plasmid-based system of claim 19, wherein the viral genomic segments comprise genes which encode a protein selected from the group consisting of

hemagglutinin and neuraminidase, or both; wherein said genes are from a pathogenic influenza virus.

23. The plasmid-based system of claim 19 wherein said system comprises one or more plasmids having a map selected from the group consisting of pHW241-PB2, pHW242-PB1, pHW243 -PA, pHW244-HA, pHW245-NP, pHW246-NA, pHW247-M, and pHW248-NS.

24. The plasmid-based system of claim 19, wherein said system comprises one or more plasmids having a map selected from the group consisting of pHW181-PB2, pHW182-PB1, pHW183 -PA, pHW184-HA, pHW185-NP, pHW186-NA, pHW187-M, and pHW188-NS.

25. A host cell comprising the plasmid-based system of claim 15.

26. A host cell comprising the plasmid-based system of claim 18.

27. A host cell comprising the plasmid-based system of claim 19.

28. A host cell comprising the plasmid-based system of claim 22.

29. A method for producing a negative strand RNA virus virion, which method comprises culturing the host cell of claim 25 under conditions that permit production of viral proteins and vRNA or cRNA.

30. A method for producing an *Orthomyxoviridae* virion, which method comprises culturing the host cell of claim 26 under conditions that permit production of viral proteins and vRNA or cRNA.

31. A method for producing an influenza virion, which method comprises culturing the host cell of claim 27 under conditions that permit production of viral proteins and vRNA or cRNA.

32. A method for producing a pathogenic influenza virion, which method comprises culturing the host cell of claim 28 under conditions that permit production of viral proteins and vRNA or cRNA.

33. A method for preparing a negative strand RNA virus-specific vaccine, which method comprises purifying a virion produced by the method of claim 29.

34. The method according to claim 33, which further comprises inactivating the virion.

35. The method according to claim 33, wherein the negative strand RNA virus is an attenuated virus.

36. A method for vaccinating a subject against a negative strand RNA virus infection, which method comprises administering a protective dose of a vaccine of claim 33 to the subject.

37. A method for vaccinating a subject against a negative strand RNA virus infection, which method comprises injecting a protective dose of a vaccine of claim 33 intramuscularly in the subject.

38. A method for vaccinating a subject against a negative strand RNA virus infection, which method comprises administering a vaccine of claim 33 intranasally to the subject.

39. A method for generating an attenuated negative strand RNA virus, which method comprises:

(a) mutating one or more viral genes in the plasmid-based system of claim 15; and

(b) determining whether infectious RNA viruses produced by the system are attenuated.

40. A composition comprising a negative strand RNA virus virion, wherein viral internal proteins of the virion are from a virus strain well adapted to grow in culture or from an attenuated strain, or both and viral antigen proteins, of the virion are from a pathogenic virus strain.

41. A composition comprising a negative strand RNA virus virion produced by the method of claim 29.